



# 2025 ANNUAL REPORT

FOR SMILES.

FOR 100 YEARS.



FOR WILDLIFE  
& WONDER.

**FOREVER.**



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# DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

As we reflect on 2025, we are proud to celebrate a truly historic milestone for the Little Rock Zoo—our **Centennial**. The Little Rock Zoo was long believed to have been established in 1926; however, historical records uncovered in preparation for a 2026 Centennial revealed its true beginnings in 1924, when the Little Rock Zoo Commission was established through City Ordinance #3664. Animal acquisitions and construction of early facilities followed in 1925, and the Zoo soon opened its doors to the public, marking the start of what would become a century-long legacy of connecting people with nature.

To commemorate this milestone, we hosted special events and experiences in 2025 that brought our community together in celebration. One of the highlights was our **Centennial Celebration** held during the June 7 **Southern Bancorp Little Rock Community Day**—one of four annual days offering discounted admission for Little Rock residents—where guests from across the community joined us in honoring 100 years of wildlife, conservation, and connection. Additional centennial activities included the launch of our **Birthday Program**, offering children free admission during their birthday month, along with the addition of historical displays highlighting our rich history.

In 2025, we also unveiled new exhibits designed to enhance the guest experience. We celebrated the grand opening of **Isle of the Dragon**, our new Komodo dragon habitat, bringing this incredible species to Little Rock in a dynamic exhibit. Complementing this addition, we introduced **Hidden Corners of the World: Uncommon Creatures**, a new amphibian and reptile habitat made possible through a generous gift from the **Conway Area Chamber of Commerce** and **Toad Suck Daze**. Together, these exhibits showcase rare and remarkable species from some of the world's most biodiverse regions and offer guests new ways to connect with wildlife.

As we celebrated our past, we also laid the foundation for our future with the groundbreaking of **Project Zoo: Wildly Reimagined**—an ambitious construction project that will transform key spaces at the Zoo's front entrance. With an updated entry plaza, amphitheater, and surrounding habitats, this project reflects our commitment to enhancing the guest experience while advancing animal care, conservation, and education for the next century.

Thank you for being a part of our journey.



Susan Altrui, Director  
**Little Rock Zoo**



FOR WILDLIFE & WONDER. FOREVER.

# MARKING A CENTURY

Throughout 2025, we proudly celebrated our centennial with special events, programs, and experiences honoring 100 years of wildlife, wonder, and community connection. A highlight of the year was the Centennial Celebration held during the June 7 **Southern Bancorp Little Rock Community Day**, which served as our official Centennial Celebration and welcomed guests from across the region to commemorate this historic milestone.

## LOOKING BACK AT OUR LEGACY

To help tell the story of the Zoo's first century, a special **Centennial Museum** was curated inside the historic Reptile & Tropical Bird House. The museum featured a timeline of the Zoo's history, historical artifacts, photographs, and memorabilia highlighting the evolution of the Little Rock Zoo through the decades.

In addition, guests were also invited to explore **Wild Look Back** signs stationed throughout Zoo, allowing visitors to pause at iconic locations and learn about their historical significance. These displays offered longtime guests the chance to reminisce on memories made at the Zoo while helping newer visitors connect with our enduring legacy.

## BIRTHDAY ADVENTURES

As part of our centennial festivities, we launched a new **Birthday Program** for children celebrating their special day at the Zoo. Birthday kids receive free admission, along with a birthday button to wear throughout their visit so everyone can join in their celebration.

To extend the fun, we also introduced a special **Animal Birthday Calendar**, allowing guests to discover when many of their favorite animal residents celebrate their birthdays throughout the year.





# ANIMAL CARE UPDATES

The Little Rock Zoo's animal collection continued to grow and evolve throughout 2025 through exciting births, new arrivals, and important transfers that reflect the collaborative conservation efforts of institutions accredited by the **Association of Zoos & Aquariums (AZA)** across the globe. Through partnerships with fellow zoos and participation in the **Species Survival Plan (SSP)**, we remain committed to supporting healthy, sustainable populations of species in human care while contributing to broader wildlife conservation initiatives.

## CONSERVATION COLLABORATION

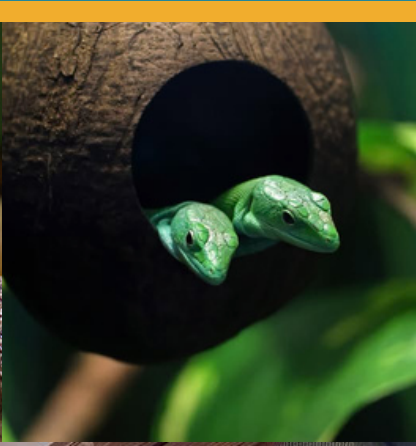


A major milestone this year was the departure of two of the three tiger cubs born at the Zoo in 2022. After their parents were transferred to other accredited facilities in 2024, the juveniles have now begun their own journeys to new homes where they may contribute to future breeding recommendations through the SSP.

International collaboration also played a major role in the Zoo's success this year with the arrival of two bush dogs from France. Their April 2025 arrival was the result of an SSP breeding recommendation. The pair quickly exceeded expectations, welcoming two litters in their first year—one in the fall and another in the winter of 2025—making this one of the Zoo's most exciting stories of the year.



Another remarkable example of inter-zoo partnership came through our collaboration with the **Philadelphia Zoo**, who entrusted us with the temporary care of sloth bears Bhalu and Kayla while their facility underwent renovations. During this time, the Zoo cared for a total of **six sloth bears—more than any other facility in North America**—marking a significant milestone for our animal care team. While in Little Rock, Kayla became pregnant and successfully delivered two healthy cubs (Aish and Baiju) in December 2025. Since then, Bhalu has returned to Philadelphia, while Kayla remains in Little Rock as she continues to care for her cubs. We are honored to play a role in their care and the future of this vulnerable species.



## NEW TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

There were also expansions to the reptile and amphibian collection in 2025 with several exciting new additions. With the opening of **Isle of the Dragon**, the Zoo welcomed a juvenile female Komodo dragon, Tiamat, joining our male resident, Iroh, and bringing our Komodo dragon population to two. In addition, the debut of **Hidden Corners of the World: Uncommon Creatures** introduced guests to a variety of new reptile and amphibian species in the Reptile House, showcasing rare and remarkable animals from some of the world's most biodiverse regions. Together, these additions enhance both the Zoo's animal collection and opportunities for guests to learn about often-overlooked species critical to global ecosystems.





## ZOO BIRTHS

Several notable births across the Zoo captured the hearts of guests and staff alike. Among the most celebrated was the arrival of **Beni**, a western lowland gorilla, born in March 2025. Beni's birth quickly garnered national attention when he was featured on the **TODAY Show**, where audiences helped select his name, introducing his story to viewers across the country.

Later in the year, the Zoo welcomed **Amali**, a female chimpanzee, born to mother Kianga in August 2025. Following the heartbreaking loss of a chimpanzee infant in 2024, Amali's arrival was especially meaningful for both staff and guests. She has been warmly welcomed by the troop, who have shown curiosity and care as she begins integrating into the group.



Additionally, bush dogs, Luz and Paku, welcomed their first litter in August 2025, followed by a second litter in December 2025. Together, the two litters produced five pups, representing an important contribution to the managed population of this rarely seen South American canid.

In partnership with the Philadelphia Zoo, the Little Rock Zoo provided temporary care for sloth bears Bhalu and Kayla during facility renovations. While in Little Rock, Kayla gave birth to two cubs, **Aish** and **Baiju**, in December 2025.





## ZOO BIRTHS CONTINUED

Additional notable births in 2025 included:

- Kito, the colobus monkey, born in July
- Two Dik-Dik fawns, Tilly born in April and Tilda born in November
- Three Endangered African penguin chicks successfully hatched in 2025



## BORN FOR CONSERVATION

While many of the Zoo's newborns were able to delight guests during their visits, others play a direct role in wildlife conservation. Behind the scenes, the Zoo continues to breed Arkansas's official state reptile, the Eastern Collared Lizard, as part of an ongoing conservation breeding program.



Working alongside the Arkansas Game and Fish Commission, the Arkansas Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, the University of Central Arkansas, the Arkansas Natural Heritage Commission, and the University of Arkansas, the Zoo helps breed this native species for reintroduction into the Ozark Mountains. Since the first successful release of captive-bred lizards in 2023, the program has continued to support efforts to restore populations of this iconic Arkansas species throughout its native range.

# EXCEPTIONAL ANIMAL CARE

Behind every memorable guest experience at the Little Rock Zoo is a dedicated team committed to the health and wellbeing of the animals in our care. In 2025 that commitment was demonstrated through exceptional expertise, collaboration, and compassion. This year also underscored the importance of advanced diagnostics, preventive medicine, and partnerships with local medical professionals in supporting the long-term health of our animal residents.

## CARING FOR ZINA

One of the most notable examples this year was the ongoing care of Zina, the Zoo's eldest Asian elephant, who tested positive for tuberculosis (TB) through routine preventive screening in July 2025.

The Zoo's veterinary and elephant care teams immediately implemented a comprehensive, individualized treatment and monitoring plan in collaboration with national experts. Regular care and testing continue as part of her ongoing management, with staff taking all appropriate precautions to ensure the highest standard of care. TB in elephants is not uncommon, particularly in older individuals, and early detection plays a critical role in maintaining long-term health outcomes. Zina continues to do well under this structured care plan.



## CARING FOR ALICE

Another significant health update this year involved Alice, one of our female western lowland gorillas. Alice joined the Zoo in 2021 from another accredited institution with a known history of a leg injury and a recurring skin condition. While her skin condition has shown meaningful improvement under the care of her dedicated team, Alice experienced a reinjury to her previously affected leg in 2025.

When changes in her mobility were first observed, the Zoo's veterinary team responded immediately, working in close collaboration with health care professionals at UAMS to conduct a CT scan, to better understand the extent of her injury.

Following evaluation, the veterinary team determined that a conservative treatment approach—focused on rest, monitoring, and targeted supportive therapies—was the most effective path forward. Alice has responded positively to this plan, continuing to participate in training sessions, maintain engagement with her care team, and show gradual improvement. Her condition remains closely monitored, with ongoing assessments to ensure continued progress.

# CONSERVATION PARTNERSHIPS

At the Little Rock Zoo, our mission extends far beyond the animals in our care. As Arkansas's only zoo accredited by the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA), we are committed to protecting wildlife and supporting conservation efforts both locally and around the world.

Through strategic partnerships, financial support, and staff expertise, the Zoo helps advance wildlife rescue, research, habitat protection, and community-based conservation initiatives. Together with our partners, we are working to create lasting impacts for wildlife and the people who share their landscapes.



## LEGACY PARTNER

### SPOTLIGHT: WILDLIFE SOS

For more than two decades, Wildlife SOS has been a leader in wildlife rescue and conservation across India. Founded in 1995, the organization has grown from a single rescue center in New Delhi into the country's largest wildlife rescue network, operating 12 facilities dedicated to the protection and rehabilitation of native species.

The Little Rock Zoo's partnership with Wildlife SOS is especially meaningful through our shared commitment to sloth bear conservation. Wildlife SOS operates the world's largest sloth bear rescue program, providing lifelong care for bears rescued from the illegal "dancing bear" trade while also working to protect wild populations through habitat conservation, research, and community outreach.

## SAFE SLOTH BEAR

The Little Rock Zoo is a founding member of the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' SAFE Sloth Bear program, a collaborative initiative uniting accredited zoos and international field partners to secure the future of the species. Zoo Conservation and Research Coordinator Dr. Laura Bernstein-Kurtycz serves as Vice Program Leader, while Carnivore Curator Debbie Thompson serves on the program's Steering Committee.

Through SAFE Sloth Bear, the Zoo helps support critical research in India and Sri Lanka, including efforts to better understand sloth bear populations, map their range, and address human-bear conflict. These projects provide essential information for future conservation planning and global assessments of the species.

## CONSERVATION IN ACTION: FROM ARKANSAS TO INDIA

Conservation partnerships are strengthened through collaboration, and in 2025, Little Rock Zoo staff had the opportunity to witness that impact firsthand.

Carnivore Curator Debbie Thompson and Conservation and Research Coordinator Dr. Laura Bernstein-Kurtycz traveled to India as part of the annual AZA SAFE Sloth Bear program visit. During their trip, they joined fellow SAFE Sloth Bear members at the Wildlife SOS headquarters in New Delhi, where they met with Wildlife SOS Co-Founder and CEO Kartick Satyanarayan and learned more about the organization's ongoing rescue and conservation efforts.

The journey provided an opportunity to see how the Little Rock Zoo's long-standing partnership with Wildlife SOS translates into meaningful action for sloth bears in the wild.

Following their time with Wildlife SOS, the team traveled with Dr. Nishith Dharaiya and researchers from the Wildlife Conservation Biology Research Foundation to several sloth bear habitats in Rajasthan. They explored Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary, gaining a firsthand understanding of the landscapes wild sloth bears depend upon. They also visited Mount Abu, where increasing interactions between bears and people highlight the growing challenges of habitat loss and human-wildlife conflict.

One of the most impactful experiences was observing the Wildlife Conservation Biology Research Foundation's education outreach program in local schools. Through lessons, activity books, and educational materials, students learn how to safely coexist with sloth bears—knowledge that is especially important for communities where encounters with bears are common.

These experiences reinforce the Little Rock Zoo's belief that conservation extends far beyond zoo grounds. By supporting research, education, and international partnerships, the Zoo is helping protect sloth bears and empowering communities to live alongside wildlife for generations to come.



# EDUCATION & VOLUNTEER IMPACT

Creating meaningful connections between people and wildlife is at the heart of our mission. In 2025, staff, interns, and volunteers recorded **105,497** meaningful onsite guest interactions through educational conversations, animal interpretation, program participation, and day-to-day guest assistance. Each interaction helped create a more engaging and memorable experience for Zoo visitors.

The Zoo's education programs reached audiences of all ages both on and off grounds. Outreach programs connected with **8,161** participants throughout the community, while special awareness days welcomed **4,631** participants and citizen science activities engaged **728** guests in hands-on conservation learning. Educational programs and experiences served an additional **15,622** participants, providing opportunities that bring our community closer to nature.

Zoofari Summer Camp continued to be one of the Zoo's most successful educational offerings, welcoming **442** campers in 2025. Through immersive experiences and hands-on learning, campers developed a deeper appreciation for wildlife and conservation.

Volunteers remained an essential part of the Zoo's success, contributing **7,232** hours of service with an estimated value of **\$251,600**. Their dedication supported animal care, education programs, special events, and guest services, helping the Little Rock Zoo fulfill its mission while creating exceptional experiences for guests every day.

**105,497**

Onsite Guest Interactions



**15,622**

Program Participants



**7,232**

Volunteer Hours Contributed



**8,161**

Outreach Participants



**4,631**

Awareness Day Participants



**728**

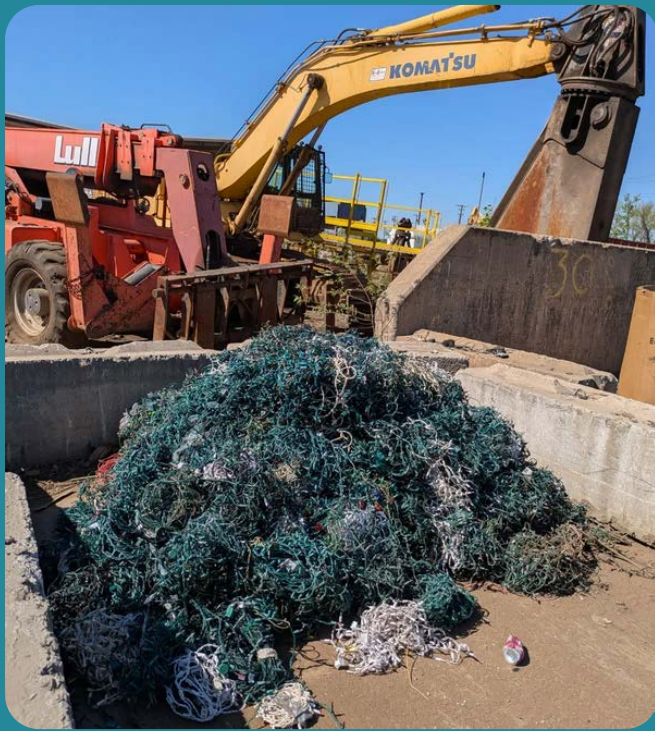
Citizen Science Participants



**442**

Zoofari Campers





## LIGHTS FOR LIONS OVER THE YEARS

**2023**

1,100 lbs  
of lights collected

\$1,065  
raised for Lion  
Conservation

**2024**

2,160 lbs  
of lights collected

\$1,568  
raised for Lion  
Conservation



**2025**



2,520 lbs  
of lights collected

\$2,142  
raised for Lion  
Conservation

# RECYCLING INITIATIVES

Conservation starts with everyday actions, and the Little Rock Zoo continues to provide opportunities for the community to make a difference through innovative recycling initiatives that benefit wildlife around the world.

Year-round, the Zoo participates in **Gorillas on the Line**, collecting old cell phones and small handheld electronics for recycling. Many electronic devices contain coltan, a mineral mined in areas that overlap with wild gorilla habitat. By recycling these devices, the community helps reduce the demand for new mining while generating funds for the Association of Zoos and Aquariums' SAFE Gorilla program. Proceeds support habitat protection, wildlife monitoring, education, and other efforts to conserve gorillas in the wild.

In partnership with the **City of Little Rock Sustainability Office** and **Keep Little Rock Beautiful**, the Zoo also hosts quarterly community recycling events. These popular events provide residents with a responsible way to dispose of hard-to-recycle materials while keeping thousands of pounds of waste out of landfills each year.

During the holiday season, the Zoo's **Lights for Lions** program continued its impressive growth, making 2025 the most successful year in the program's history. In partnership with TRG in North Little Rock, the community recycled **2,520 pounds** of string lights and extension cords—an **increase of 360 pounds over 2024**. These efforts generated **\$2,142 for the Lion Recovery Fund**, a global initiative working to double the wild lion population by 2050. By giving old holiday lights a second life, Zoo supporters are helping protect one of Africa's most iconic species while reducing waste in our own community.

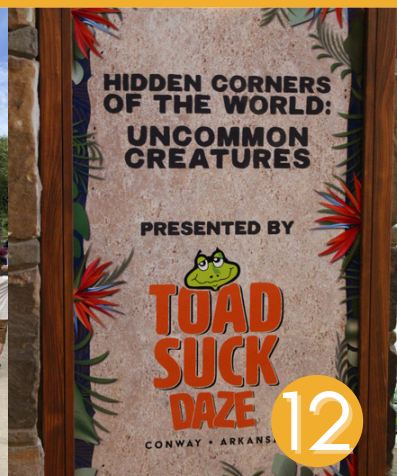
# COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

The Little Rock Zoo's success is made possible through the support of community partners who share our commitment to wildlife conservation, education, and creating memorable experiences for our community. In 2025, these partnerships played a vital role in helping us celebrate our centennial year while continuing to invest in the Zoo's future.

In 2025, we were excited to welcome Lion Legal as new partner. As part of their commitment, Lion Legal has pledged **\$50,000** over five years. These dollars will go to support the Zoo's mission, including sponsorship of signature events such as Wild Wines, Zoo Brew, and GloWILD. Their support also includes dollars for the Arkansas Zoological Foundation and the lion habitat.

We are equally grateful for the continued support of longtime partners like **Hiland Dairy**, whose generosity has made a lasting impact on the Little Rock Zoo for **nearly 20 years**. Through sponsorships and beloved community traditions such as **Hiland Dollar Day**, Hiland Dairy has helped create affordable opportunities for families to enjoy the Zoo while fostering a connection that generations of Arkansans have come to look forward to year after year.

**Southern Bancorp** sponsored four **Little Rock Community Days** in 2025, helping make the Zoo more accessible to Little Rock residents with discounted admission opportunities throughout the year.





## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS CONTINUED

Several partners also helped bring new experiences to Zoo guests in 2025. The **Laura P. Nicholas Foundation** provided support for **Isle of the Dragon**, helping bring Komodo dragons to Little Rock for the first time. The **Conway Area Chamber of Commerce** and **Toad Suck Daze**, made possible **Hidden Corners of the World: Uncommon Creatures**, introducing guests to a collection of rare and fascinating reptiles and amphibians from around the world.

Our signature events also continue to thrive thanks to dedicated community partners. **O'Looney's Wine & Liquor** remained a valued supporter of Wild Wines, while **Be Well Arkansas** continued their partnership with GloWILD, helping create unforgettable experiences for thousands of guests throughout the holiday season.

These partnerships represent more than sponsorships—they are investments in conservation, education, animal care, and the future of the Little Rock Zoo. We are deeply grateful to the organizations and individuals who help make our mission possible and look forward to continued partnerships in the years ahead.



# FACILITY UPDATES

As we celebrated 100 years of history in 2025, we also took bold steps toward shaping the future of the Little Rock Zoo. The summer marked the official groundbreaking of major construction at the Zoo's front entrance—the largest and most ambitious construction project undertaken in our 100-year history. We are laying the foundation for an enhanced guest experience and a reimagined Zoo built to inspire future generations.

## PROJECT ZOO: WILDLY REIMAGINED

Project Zoo: Wildly Reimagined is an exciting redevelopment project, that will transform the front of the Zoo into a more welcoming and engaging space. Planned updates include refreshed and expanded animal habitats, such as an **updated lemur habitat**, a **new giant anteater exhibit**, and a **shared capybara and squirrel monkey habitat**, along with the addition of a **new tortoise barn**. The project will also **modernize the Zoo's amphitheater** and incorporate new guest amenities, landscaping, an art installation and water features to create a more vibrant and inviting entrance experience.

Together, these improvements represent more than facility enhancements—they lay the foundation for the Little Rock Zoo's next 100 years, creating spaces that better support animal wellbeing while elevating the guest experience for our community.

To keep guests informed and engaged throughout this transformational process, the Zoo launched a special behind-the-scenes communications campaign documenting the early phases of construction and demolition. Through a dedicated blog series and recurring video updates, guests were invited to follow along as progress unfolded during the first several weeks of the project. Adding a fun and family-friendly touch to the campaign was **Rodney the Capybara**, a cartoon mascot created to "monitor" construction progress on behalf of the animals and provide playful project updates along the way. These creative storytelling efforts helped build excitement, transparency, and anticipation as guests watched the future of their Zoo begin to take shape.



Looking ahead to future opportunities, we're already exploring additional transformations across the grounds. One of the next areas identified for revitalization is the Overlook, where plans envision redesigning this space to include the relocation of the sloth bears to a prominent new habitat near the front entrance. This enhancement would breathe new life into one of the Zoo's older areas while creating an even more dynamic guest experience.

Long-term, this shift could also create opportunities for future redevelopment of the Zoo's former bear habitats. As outlined in the Zoo's master plan, one of the most anticipated aspirations for this space is the return of **giraffes** to the Little Rock Zoo—a beloved species frequently requested by guests and deeply missed by our community. **Bringing giraffes back to Little Rock is a vision we share with our visitors.** Making that dream a reality will require significant planning, facility development, and financial investment to create the specialized habitat and care this iconic species deserves. While this goal will take time, continued support from our guests, donors, and community partners will be essential in helping bring this future vision to life.

With the continued support of our community, donors, and partners, we will continue to provide Zoo experiences that increasingly inspire wonder, and excitement for generations to come.





FOR WILDLIFE



FOR WONDER

## 2025 REVENUE

The financial health of the Little Rock Zoo remained strong in 2025, thanks to the generous support of the City of Little Rock, our community, members, and partners.

Admissions \$1,768,486.52  
Membership \$565,446.33  
Amusement Rides/Tokens \$237,373.21

Education \$15,702.19  
Special Events \$92,647.07  
Misc. Revenue \$9,196.18

Concessions \$81,332.10\*  
Gift Shop \$89,170.90\*

**Total Revenue Earned \$2,859,354.50**  
**Total Operations (Expenses) \$7,987,735.16**  
**Transfer In \$5,146,512.78**

\*Concessions & Gift Shop operated by an outside contractor.  
Revenue reflects a percent payment.

# ARKANSAS ZOOLOGICAL FOUNDATION IMPACT

The Arkansas Zoological Foundation, the Little Rock Zoo's philanthropic partner, plays a vital role in advancing the Zoo's mission through support of animal care, conservation, education, and capital improvements. Established in 2003 as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, the Foundation raises funds to support the continued growth and development of the Little Rock Zoo while helping inspire future generations to care for wildlife and wild places.

Over the years, Foundation support has helped bring many signature projects to life, including the **Arkansas Heritage Farm, Diamond Express Train, Cheetah Outpost, and Penguin Pointe.**

In 2025, the Arkansas Zoological Foundation provided **\$346,500** in support to the Little Rock Zoo, investing in animal care, conservation, professional development, educational opportunities, and facility improvements that strengthen the Zoo's impact both on and off grounds.

| Initiative                             | Contribution |
|----------------------------------------|--------------|
| Veterinary Equitment                   | \$95,000     |
| Sculptures and Public Art Enhancements | \$77,000     |
| Traveling Exhibits                     | \$50,000     |
| Wildlife Conservation Donations        | \$46,000     |
| Intern Program                         | \$31,500     |
| Staff professional Development         | \$29,000     |
| Deferred Maintenance Projects          | \$18,000     |